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by

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Unlike some wildlife species, tree squirrels are treated as game animals in every state where found. Thus, there are often restructions on times when tree squirrels may be controlled. In areas of high human population, there may be restrictions on ways in which squirrels may be controlled. Finally, because of human affection for squirrels, there may be places where effective control is almost impossible.

The reasons for desiring control are varied. Squirrels cause economic loss. For example, in Georgia squirrels are a major depredator on pecans. A squirrel will eat about 1 1/2 pounds of pecans per week and waste or bury another 2 pounds for a total of approximately 14 pounds a month per squirrel. Since squirrel damage starts as soon as the kernel forms, it may occur over a period of four months. Thus, each squirrel can eat or damage about 56 pounds a season. At 50¢ per pound, which is not uncommon today, each squirrel costs $28.

At times squirrels may damage shade trees. This has been noted in the north during severe winters when other food sources were not available. It has occurred on the University of Georgia campus when mast was in short supply.

However, you don't have to be a pecan grower or a landscape manager to have squirrel damage. A squirrel trapped inside a building can cause extensive damage. In addition to damage from attempts to gnaw through siding, etc. there is also the fire hazard resulting from gnawing on electrical conduit or wiring.

Squirrels represent a health hazard. They carry arthopods which will transfer to man. Squirrels carry rabies, although rarely has this been a reason for someone to call and ask for help with a squirrel problem.

At times squirrels create aesthetic problems. Some people do not like the untidy appearance of leaf nests in deciduous trees in autumn. Gnawing can make structures unattractive. Squirrels in attiçs or other confined areas may create odor problems.

Most problems are caused by red squirrel, gray squirrel, fox squirrel and flying squirrel. Other species may also cause damage in some cases.

There is no need to give a rundown on squirrels since most people are familiar with them. I would like to call attention to the fact that squirrels, like other rodents, can gain entry through an amazingly small opening. Keep this in mind when a structure is examined for squirrel entries. If not, it is very easy to overlook "doorways" through which squirrels come and go.

As with any wildlife damage control problem, the best first step is to exclude animals. Squirrels must be removed prior to sealing a building against squirrel entry. If not, they may create more of a problem than if allowed free access. Repel all resident squirrels before plugging entry and exit holes. Naphthalene is registered as a squirrel

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repellent. Broadcast 5 pounds for each 2000 cubic feet of space used by squirrels. Once squirrels have been repelled, an all-out effort should be made to locate and squirrel-proof every opening. Remove tree branches that may give squirrels access to roof and upper stores of buildings. Metal guards can be placed around trees adjacent to buildings but are ineffective if nearby trees are unguarded.

Other situations are more difficult. Steps can be taken to alleviate damage, but there are no guarantees. For example, corn and pecan trees are often growing adjacent to native hardwood stands. This is an open invitation to squirrels. When squirrels are a problem, woods should be cut back to create a strip without cover which they must cross to reach a protected crop. The strip should be kept mown.

One inch mesh fencing together with electrified strands will help prevent entry. Have at least 30 inches above ground with at least 1 foot buried. Bury 12 inches with the lower 6 inches extending outward to discourage burrowing. (If fence is to prevent entry by other species, it may be necessary to alter the design). There must be at least 1 strand of electrified wire 2 inches to 6 inches above the ground. It is even better if an additional wire is on top.

Unfortunately, little can be done to deny squirrels access to food and water since many of the sources of these requirements also make man's environment more attractive. Artificial feeders and waterers can be made squirrel-proof. Information on how to do this is available through the Cooperative Extension Service in each state.

Nuisance squirrels can be directly eliminated by trapping and hunting. However, it should be understood that as long as attractants exist, problems will recur.

Trapping may involve use of live or kill-traps. The choice may depend upon state law and personal preference. In either case, traps should be placed as close as possible to travelways and areas being used. Baits must be attractive, for example, peanut butter or nut meats. Often, best results will be obtained when baited, unset traps are allowed to remain until squirrels overcome fear of these. After setting, inspect traps frequently and remove trapped animals. This prevents remaining squirrels from becoming alarmed and trap-shy. Another benefit of frequent checks is that the catch can be eaten. When live trapping, take animals a minimum of 5 miles before release.

Shooting can alleviate the problem. As with trapping, shooting will not prevent recurrence if attractants remain. It may be possible for a corn or pecan grower to sell hunting permits and thereby recoup a portion of the economic loss. In some states, shooting as a control technique is limited to the hunting season. In others, permits for trapping or shooting outside the regular seasons can be obtained if damage is shown.

Questions about toxicants for control come sooner or later. There is no toxicant registered for use against tree squirrels. Even if one were registered on the Federal level, most states would forbid its use.